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Negotiated Agreements as a Tool for Resolving Transboundary Water Conflicts

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Bonnie G. Colby is Professor of Agricultural and Resource Economics at The University of Arizona, where she has been a faculty member since 1983. She has authored numerous publications on the economics of water issues, including the books *Water Markets in Theory and Practice* and *Indian Water Rights: Negotiating the Future*. She has provided testimony on these matters to state legislatures around the West and to Congress. She served on the National Research Council's Committee on Western Water Management, the Committee on Managing Glen Canyon Dam, and most recently on the National Academy of Science committee investigating the Army Corps of Engineer's use of economic methodology to evaluate billion-dollar proposed projects on US waterways.

ABSTRACT

Hundreds of inter-jurisdictional water disputes are being litigated and negotiated around the world. The scale of transboundary conflicts ranges from disputes between neighboring cities, indigenous tribes and irrigation districts to disputes among multiple nations attempting to manage a common watershed. While some disputes are resolved expeditiously, many involve protracted, costly and bitter struggles.

Although resolution of water conflicts represents a substantial investment by the public and private sectors, there has been little systematic, substantive evaluation of the many agreements that have been negotiated as a part of conflict resolution efforts. Often intergovernmental water agreements are announced with great enthusiasm after years of complex negotiations, but then founder as the parties confront the details of implementing their agreement. This paper identifies criteria for evaluating inter-jurisdictional water management agreements and reports the findings of a study that applies these criteria to selected water conflict cases. The paper concludes with specific suggestions for crafting more enduring and implementable intergovernmental agreements, drawing on examples from around the world.

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